

REFUGEE MENTAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

1) INTRODUCTION

Who is a refugee?

A refugee is a person who fled his or her country of origin and is unable to return due to persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group (UNHCR- <http://www.unhcr.org/>).

Processing of refugees for U.S. resettlement

Overseas processing entities (OPEs) interview applicants, prepare paperwork for USCIS, and arrange medical examinations and background security checks for refugees approved by USCIS. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) arranges transportation to the United States.

Refugees in Utah

It is estimated that there are 25,000-50,000 refugees, speaking more than 40 languages, living in Utah; the majority of whom live in Salt Lake County. In fact, Utah welcomes approximately 1,100 refugees each year. Since 2009, the majority of arrivals have been from six populations: Iraqis, Somalis, Bhutanese, Karen, Congolese from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Chin. Additionally, there have been significant Sudanese, Iranian, Eritrean, Karenni, Burmese, Afghani and Cuban arrivals during the same time period.

There are two resettlement agencies in Utah: the International Rescue Committee (IRC) [<http://www.rescue.org/us-program/us-salt-lake-city-ut>] and Catholic Community Services (CCS) [<https://www.ccsutah.org/>]. The resettlement agency is the most important source of information and assistance during the refugees' first months in the United States. The resettlement agency ensures that refugees are welcomed at the airport; arranges for their housing, furniture and basic household supplies; conducts orientation; and prepares a resettlement plan, which includes referrals to social services and employment. Refugees resettled through CCS receive direct support for 12 months after which their case is transferred to the Refugee and Immigrant Center at the Asian Association of Utah (RIC-AAU), a community-based organization that provides employment, mental health, ESL, case management and citizenship services to refugees and immigrants. IRC provides supportive services to refugee clients for the full 24 months. The Utah Refugee Services Office (RSO), housed in the Department of Workforce Services (DWS), facilitates the support of the larger refugee community through various initiatives, including capacity building of ethnic-based community organizations, also known as Refugee Community Organizations (RCOs).

2) MENTAL HEALTH

Mental Health Concerns

After the job is secure, housing is handled and food is on the table, the headaches, stomach aches, or chronic shoulder pain may remain. Trauma and torture often present as recurring physical ailments — and treating these emotional wounds among Utah's newest residents can be much harder than meeting basic needs. Many men were kidnapped, beaten, tortured in their homelands; women were raped; and children were abused. Many refugees have been humiliated and degraded because of their religion, politics, or race.

- Refugees are part of the collateral damage of political, ethnic, and religious unrest in the world. About 1,100 of those refugees arrive in Utah each year.
- A study conducted by The Harvard Program in Refugee Torture found that the prevalence of psychiatric disorders in the refugee communities has been revealed to be up to ten times higher than in a nontraumatized population (Fazel, M., et al., 2005)
- Studies have also documented a greater prevalence of psychiatric disorders among refugee populations when compared to the general population; these disorders include: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, somatization, and adjustment reactions (Ovitt, N., et al., 2003)
- A review of Utah refugee arrivals (Wong, J., 2015) between October 1, 2009 and September 30, 2014 found that:
 - 27% of the total arriving refugee population had symptoms of mental health conditions

- Among those, 10% had symptoms of anxiety, 9% of depression and 25% showed symptoms of having suffered torture and violence
- The highest burden of mental health conditions and risk factors was among those between the ages of 45 and 64 years
- A higher percentage of women had mental health conditions and were twice as likely to be referred for services as men
- Structural and cultural barriers to mental health care utilization experienced by the refugees include (Wong, et al. 2006):
 - Cultural barriers such as distrust of Western care (greater confidence in alternative care);
 - High cost;
 - Language;
 - Transportation; and
 - Competing priorities
- The refugee experience can be very traumatic and rates of PTSD and major depression in settled refugees can range from 10-40% and 5-15%, respectively. (RHTAC - <http://refugeehealthta.org/>)
- The rate of PTSD among all Americans is 6.8% (<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/>); the rate among refugees is up to 5.8 times higher.
- The rate of major depression among all Americans is 6.7% (NIMH - <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>); refugee adults are twice as likely to experience major depression.
- Children and adolescents often have higher levels with various investigations revealing rates of PTSD from 50-90% and major depression from 6-40%. (RHTAC)
- The best estimates for PTSD rates in the general population are 3.7% for boys and 6.3% for girls (ptsd.va.gov); a refugee adolescent is between 7 and 24 times more likely to meet criteria for PTSD. An estimated 3.3% of all American adolescents experience major depression (NIMH); a refugee adolescent is up to 12 times more likely to experience major depression.
- Utah continues with major efforts to address the mental health needs of refugees, with targeted mental health treatment and support in refugees' own languages, and referrals using validated screening tools. Through collaborative work between multiple agencies including CCS, IRC, RIC-AAU, Utah Department of Health, RSO, Salt Lake County, Utah Health and Human Rights, Optum Health and other stakeholders in the community, great strides have been made in improving the access and quality of mental health services for the refugee community.

Mental Health Care Services

<http://utahrefugee.org/mental-health-care.html>

- a) The Children's Center
Phone: 801-582-5534 ext. 349
- b) Safety Net Program for Families with Young Children
Address: 350 S. 400 E. Salt Lake City, Utah 84111
- c) Refugee and Immigrant Center at Asian Association of Utah (RIC @ AAU):
Community Wellness Services - Phone: 801-467-6060, Address: 155 S. 300 W. Salt Lake City, Utah, <http://aau-slc.org/>
- d) Utah Health and Human Rights (UHHR)
UHHR provides services to refugees, asylee seekers and immigrants who have endured severe human rights abuses, including torture and war-related trauma and. Phone: 801-363-4596, Address: 225 S. 200 E. Suite 250 Salt Lake City, Utah 84111, <http://www.uhhr.org/>
- e) Valley Behavioral Health (VBH)
Phone: 801-539-7000, North Valley Mental Health, Address: 1020 S. Main Suite 100 Salt Lake City, Utah 84101
VBH centralized intake line: (888) 949-4VMH (4864)
- f) 24-Hour Crisis Care and Services
Phone: 801-261-1442, Toll Free 1-800-537-8739 FREE
- g) University of Utah Outreach Team
Phone: 801-587-3000
- h) National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
Phone: 1-800-273-TALK FREE (8255)
- i) Family Support Center
Phone: 801-955-9110, Address: 1760 W 4805 S, Taylorsville, Utah, 84129, <http://www.familysupportcenter.org/>

Resources for Providers

- Utah Refugee Health Program, Utah Department of Health (<http://health.utah.gov/epi/healthypeople/refugee/>)
- Utah Refugee Services Office, Department of Workforce Services (<https://jobs.utah.gov/refugee/>)
- Utah Health and Human Rights (<http://www.uhhr.org/>)
- Refugee and Immigrant Center-Asian Association of Utah (<http://aaui-slc.org/>)
- Catholic Community Services of Utah (<https://www.ccsutah.org/>)
- International Rescue Committee-Salt Lake City (<http://www.rescue.org/us-program/us-salt-lake-city-ut>)
- Office of Refugee Resettlement (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr>)
- [www.http://healtorture.org](http://healtorture.org)
- National Partnership for Community Training (<http://gulfcoastjewishfamilyandcommunityservices.org/refugee/refugee-programs/national-partnership-for-community-training/>)
- Refugee Health TB Center (RHTAC) (<http://refugeehealthta.org/>)
- Suggested readings: <https://jobs.utah.gov/refugee/resources/manual/suggestedreading.pdf>
- Suggested documentaries & movies: <https://jobs.utah.gov/refugee/resources/manual/suggestedmovies.pdf>
- Typical refugee experience: <https://jobs.utah.gov/refugee/resources/manual/typical.pdf>

Academic Resources

Annamalai, A., et al. Refugee Health Care: An Essential Guide (2014). Springer, New York.

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Wong, J., "Mental Health on Arrival: An Analysis of Refugee Mental Health in Utah" (2015). Utah Department of Health. [http://health.utah.gov/epi/healthypeople/refugee/mh_analysis\(Feb2015\).pdf](http://health.utah.gov/epi/healthypeople/refugee/mh_analysis(Feb2015).pdf)